

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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U.S. Economic Recovery Continues, Job Rates Improve

By MacKenzie C. Babb
Staff Writer

Washington — The U.S. economic recovery is proceeding at a moderate pace and overall conditions in the labor market are improving gradually, Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke says.

"I am very confident that in the long run, the U.S. will return to being the most productive, one of the fastest-growing and dynamic economies in the world. It hasn't lost any of the basic characteristics that made it the preeminent economy in the world before the crisis, and I think we will return to that status as we recover," Bernanke said April 27 in a news conference on the economy. The press event marks the first time a Federal Reserve chairman, the country's central banker, has taken questions from the media immediately following monetary policy decisions.

Bernanke highlighted improving conditions in the labor market: The unemployment rate decreased and employment increased in March.

"New claims for unemployment insurance and indicators of hiring plans are also consistent with continued improvement," he said.

Bernanke said the unemployment rate for 2011 is now expected to come in between 8.4 percent and 8.7 percent, down from earlier projections that it would remain between 8.8 percent and 9.0 percent.

The chairman said he believes the rate of financial recovery will also continue to improve. He said that while household spending and investment has expanded, supporting the recovery, nonresidential spending is still weak and the housing sector remains depressed.

Bernanke spoke after meeting with the Federal Open Market Committee, the Federal Reserve's monetary policy decisionmaking body. The committee announced earlier April 27 that it will maintain its policy of reinvesting principal payments from its securities holdings and said it will complete its planned purchases of \$600 billion of long-term Treasury securities by the end of June.

"Looking ahead, committee participants expect a moderate recovery to continue through 2011, with some acceleration of growth projected for 2012 and 2013," Bernanke said. Specifically, he said the committee's projections for output growth are between 3.1 percent and 3.3 percent for 2011, rising to between 3.5 percent and 4.2 percent for 2012 and 2013.

But projections for gross domestic product estimates, the broadest measure of the nation's economic health, have dropped from earlier estimates. The committee now expects the GDP to grow between 3.1 percent and 3.3 percent in 2011, down from its January estimate of between 3.4 percent and 3.9 percent growth for 2011.

Bernanke said the lowered projections reflect a slower than anticipated rate of growth in the first quarter of 2011. But he said the slower growth appears to be "transitory," attributing it to lower defense spending, weaker exports and a lack of momentum in construction.

Additionally, Bernanke said the recent rise in commodity prices, such as gasoline, is likely to be temporary, with inflation to decline toward acceptable levels as the recent increases begin to ease.

In a statement released April 27, the Open Market Committee said it will "continue to monitor the economic outlook and financial developments and will employ its policy tools as necessary to support the economic recovery," including helping to ensure that inflation rates remain within the standard range.

Americans Are Taking Their Children to Work

By Mark Trainer
Staff Writer

Washington — In 1993, the Ms. Foundation for Women responded to studies showing a decline in self-image among girls in their teenage years with Take Our Daughters to Work Day.

The first event targeted mothers and daughters in New York, intending to show girls the rich variety of careers waiting for them when they entered the work force. Interest was so high that the program was expanded nationwide. In 2003, the event became Take Our Daughters and Sons to Work Day.

Take Our Daughters and Sons to Work Day is Thursday, April 28, in 2011.

Last year in the United States, both parents worked in 58.1 percent of married couples with children. While dual employment raises a family's income, parents must balance the demands of their workplaces with the responsibilities to their family. Some employers have attempted to address this issue by offering flexible work schedules and occasional work-from-home arrangements that allow employees to adjust their work to their family's needs.

United States Intensifies Malaria Fight in 14 African Countries

By Kathryn McConnell
Staff Writer

Washington — The Peace Corps and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) have teamed up to cut in half the cases of malaria in the at-risk populations of 14 countries in sub-Saharan Africa by 2014.

While efforts to reduce the disease have shown signs of success, “we can save an additional 500,000 lives a year” with more outreach, said USAID Administrator Rajiv Shah. Peace Corps Director Aaron Williams and Shah announced their new collaboration April 26 at Peace Corps headquarters in Washington. USAID leads the 6-year-old President’s Malaria Initiative, which includes the Centers for Disease Control.

Malaria is “preventable and treatable,” Williams said.

The initiative “is probably the single best investment we can make to save lives,” Shah said.

Seven of the countries where the malaria initiative has been implemented have experienced on average a 36 percent reduction in malaria cases.

“Something else is happening,” Shah added. “When we get a bed net out to a child and they sleep under it, they get sick less often and are able to learn more at school. Hospital case-loads lighten because they do not have to treat so many people with malaria.”

Under this program, about three Peace Corps volunteers will be assigned to each country. They will distribute insecticide-treated bed nets and boost indoor residual spraying. They will teach communities about the importance of using nets consistently, getting tested for the disease and receiving prompt treatment. Volunteers also will assist malaria initiative advisers in monitoring, documenting and evaluating results. The best practices learned will be shared among the 3,000 Peace Corps volunteers serving in Africa. They will receive training from malaria prevention and treatment specialists from Johns Hopkins University.

The effort capitalizes on the trust Peace Corps volunteers have established in the communities where they serve.

According to the World Health Organization, the estimated number of deaths from malaria worldwide has fallen from nearly 1 million in 2000 to about 781,000 in 2009. Yet, malaria remains one of the major public health problems in Africa, with about 80 percent of malaria deaths among children less than 5 years old.

Peace Corps volunteers already have worked with the malaria initiative, Williams said. In Benin, for example, volunteers have taught families how to hang bed nets and the importance of prompt treatment for malaria symptoms. Peace Corps volunteers have supported malaria monitoring efforts in Madagascar and have worked on eliminating mosquito breeding areas with water and sanitation projects in Ghana. In Senegal, Peace Corps volunteers worked with the nonprofits World Vision and Tostan to distribute more than 1 million bed nets, Williams said.

In addition to those four countries, 10 others currently are targeted — Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Gambia, Kenya, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Rwanda, Tanzania and Zambia. A 15th country — Uganda — will be added by the end of 2011.

The President’s Malaria Initiative was launched in 2005 by President George W. Bush. In 2009, President Obama unveiled the Global Health Initiative, a six-year effort to reduce the burden of disease and promote healthy communities and families around the world.

Heart Disease and Cancer Are World’s Top Killers

By Charlene Porter
Staff Writer

Washington — Diseases that you won’t catch from someone else are the most likely to kill you, wherever you live in the world, according to a new report from the World Health Organization (WHO).

WHO’s Global status report on noncommunicable diseases finds that cardiovascular disease, cancer, respiratory disease and diabetes cause the greatest number of deaths each year — 63 percent of all deaths worldwide in 2008.

Despite the public health concern devoted to communicable diseases, such as HIV/AIDS, pandemic flu and measles, the ones that you may aggravate with your own lifestyle and health habits are the most fatal. Cardiovascular diseases — heart attacks and strokes — killed 17 million people worldwide last year, with cancer coming in second at 7.6 million deaths.

“For some countries, it is no exaggeration to describe the situation as an impending disaster, a disaster for health, for society and most of all for national economies,” said Dr. Margaret Chan, WHO’s director-general, who announced the findings April 27.

While some may think these conditions arise from a developed-world lifestyle of rich food and little activity, the study finds that low- and middle-income nations also carry a serious health burden in noncommunicable

diseases, with nearly 80 percent of the 36 million deaths in 2008 occurring in less affluent nations. In both rich and poor countries, the risk factors are the same: tobacco use, physical inactivity, harmful alcohol use and poor diet.

In fact, WHO finds that noncommunicable diseases probably deliver a double blow to developing countries. "They cause billions of dollars in losses of national income," Chan said, "and they push millions of people below the poverty line, each and every year."

The preventive strategies that the WHO report suggests target poor lifestyle habits. Policies for stronger anti-tobacco laws and the promotion of healthy diet are recommended. Increased physical activity, moderate alcohol use and better access to medical care for all are among the policy recommendations made by the report.

Policies curtailing tobacco use have been on the march across the United States in recent years. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported April 21 that half of U.S. states have enacted laws requiring smoke-free workplaces, restaurants and nightclubs in the last 10 years. Local governments started acting when the evidence of harm from secondhand smoke became indisputable. Nonsmokers who are exposed to secondhand smoke at home or work increase their heart disease risk by 25 percent to 30 percent, the CDC reports. It estimates that 46,000 heart disease deaths are caused annually by exposure to secondhand smoke.

The release of the Global status report on noncommunicable diseases is a step in an ongoing strategy adopted by the World Health Assembly in 2008 to better prevent and control these illnesses. It was released as a Moscow meeting focused on the issue was about to convene for a two-day session that will focus on the severity of the problem and will advocate stronger countermeasures.

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